

A New
English Primer

AN INTRODUCTION TO
LINGUISTIC CONCEPTS
AND SYSTEMS

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KANSAS STATE
TEACHERS COLLEGE

MACMILLAN EDUCATION

For Steve, Sue, and Bill

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Preface

Lately there has been a surge of interest in the information provided by contemporary linguistic research, and teachers of English increasingly are encouraged, if not required, to include some elements of linguistics in both secondary-school and elementary-school curricula or to use linguistically oriented language arts textbooks in their classrooms. All of this interest in linguistics is good, but my experience as an instructor of both prospective and practicing teachers has led me to believe that new linguistic information is too often lost to them simply because they lack a grasp of fundamental linguistic concepts. That is the problem to which this book is addressed.

Perhaps I should say here what the book is *not*: it is not an attempt to extend the frontiers of linguistic inquiry or even, for that matter, to report much of what is happening on those frontiers, although that is both important and fascinating. Rather, the book—as its title implies—is an attempt to present the concepts that are useful to a basic understanding and appreciation of contemporary linguistic systems. It differs from other textbooks in that it introduces only the most important concepts, leaving to the student (or the instructor) the decision to pursue any or all of them further. It relates these concepts to both structural and generative-transformational grammars, providing a background that should help students to adapt to the variations in terminology and method that they will encounter in their later reading. The book also draws explicit parallels between structural and generative-transformational grammars and, where appropriate, discusses the strengths and weaknesses of the different modes of inquiry.

Each chapter concludes with a brief list of readings, meant as a guide to more extended explanations than a primer such as this one permits. In addition, a selected bibliography can be found in Appendix C. At intervals in the text there are exercises for the student to try if he wishes, and in Appendix A there are suggested applications of the book's concepts. Neither the exercises nor the applications are intended to be prescriptive: ideally the study of language should be a creative activity, one in which students choose their own areas of concentration.

The selected bibliography, suggested readings, and notes acknowledge my debt to those scholars whose works influenced this book. I owe much to the many students who responded to various drafts of the book, and I am grateful for valuable commentary from many reviewers, especially my colleague Melvin G. Storm. Charles E. Walton, another colleague and chairman of my department, gave tangible form to his encouragement by arranging for clerical assistance and a convenient class schedule. My thanks go also to the staff of St. Martin's Press for their patience, concern, and editorial expertise in bringing this book into print.

William R. Elkins

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